

Opening Statement of Chairman Tom Davis
Committee on Government Reform
“Installation of In-Line Baggage Screening Systems: Increasing Safety and
Efficiency for Travelers to and from our
Nation’s Capital”

Friday, February 17, 2006

Good morning and welcome to today’s hearing on in-line checked baggage screening systems.

Immediately after the September 11th attacks, Congress mandated explosives screening for all checked baggage by December 31, 2002. To meet this tight deadline, the Transportation Security Administration deployed Explosives Detection Systems and Explosives Trace Detection machines in airport check-in areas around the country.

As we have just seen upstairs, the stand-alone EDS machines are large and create congestion in airport terminals. They require substantial human operation and can process – at best – 180 bags per hour. The smaller ETD machines are even more labor-intensive and can process only 36 bags per hour. With the technology available today, that simply is not good enough. The flying public is growing impatient.

Right here at Dulles Airport, according to a July 2005 *Washington Post* article, one airline reported that their flights are being delayed as much as 45 minutes because of the limited number of baggage screening machines. Other airlines reported delays because they are required to share baggage screening equipment with eight other airlines – and that’s equipment that can screen only 100 bags per hour.

We look forward to hearing further about Dulles and Reagan Airports from Mr. Bennett and how the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority is addressing the concerns of its air carriers and passengers. But I am sure these delays are not unique to Dulles.

One of the solutions to these delays is better leveraging of technology. We are now onto the next generation of screening machines and processes. Baggage screening is being integrated into baggage conveyor systems. In-line screening systems increase baggage screening from 180 bags per hour to more than 450 bags per hour. And, reducing the current level of human interaction with the baggage saves TSA money in personnel costs and workers compensation.

Baltimore / Washington International Airport now has a full in-line system which went online in 2005. BWI now has the capacity to screen up to 2,400 bags per hour, and we look forward to hearing from Mr. Campbell about the increased efficiency at BWI.

We understand that moving baggage screening in-line is neither a small task nor a cheap one. We gave TSA authorization to help finance airports' installation of in-line systems. Under this Letter of Intent program, TSA pays for 100 percent of acquisition and installation of screening machines and for 75 percent of the airport's facility modification costs.

Studies by the Government Accountability Office and TSA demonstrate that, even in the short-term, installation of in-line screening systems practically pays for itself. However, even though TSA's program has been in effect for over three years, only 116 of the Nation's 451 airports have EDS machines, and only 12 of these airports have fully in-line systems. The remainder are either partially in-line or stand-alone.

The purpose of today's hearing is to understand why TSA's funding of in-line systems has stalled and what steps TSA is taking towards putting more in-line systems in airports to improve airport safety and efficiency. Also, given the expense of installing in-line baggage systems, we want to understand how TSA is prioritizing which airports will receive federal assistance and what funds are actually available.

We look forward to hearing from Dr. Randy Null, the Assistant Administrator for Operational Process and Technology at TSA regarding the status of the TSA's Letter of Intent program and the creative financing solutions they are pursuing. We also look forward to hearing about TSA's forthcoming *EDS Strategic Plan*, which prioritizes airports for in-line installation.

Before we hear from our witnesses, however, the Committee would like to express our gratitude to Dulles Airport and MWAA for hosting today's hearing and for providing us this morning's tour of Dulles' baggage screening areas.